

EVENING TELEGRAPH-SUPPLEMENT

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TRIPLE SHEET--THREE CENTS.

CHRISTMAS COLUMN

SANTA CLAUS.

From the Hearth and Home.
On Christmas Eve, when the moon shone bright,
Nelly and Kate saw a wonderful sight
Where the fire had faded away:
A funny old man, with a pipe as funny,
A flowing white beard, and a face so sunny
That it gave the pale moonlight a golden glow,
And seemed to warm the glittering snow.
The funny old man was laden with toys,
And he tossed them down without any noise,
Till in beautiful heaps they lay.
Not a whit frightened were Nelly and Kate,
For they thought it a dream (it was so very late),
And they slept again, unaware.
The first crimson ray, when it came to tell
That Christmas had risen, and all was well,
Saw Nelly and Kitty among the rest,
Happy, and loving, and merry, and blest,
Taking their treasures from stockings and floor,
And thanking the giver a hundred times o'er--
But the ashes were grey and bare.

MAN PROPOSES.

A CHRISTMAS STORY.

CHAPTER I.

MY FRAMES OF MIND.

What, Mrs. Slocombe! you "looked at that fire a quarter of an hour ago, and it was all right," then?" I am sorry to contradict a woman under any circumstances; but really, Mrs. Slocombe, you are old enough to know better. Yes, Mrs. Slocombe, old enough. I say it advisedly, and you must be aware yourself that you are no chicken, Mrs. Slocombe. No, I did not say that you were old, absolutely old; I simply said that you were old enough to know better, and that position I still maintain. It is a physical impossibility that this fire could have been all right a quarter of an hour ago, and it's no use saying any more about it. I am the best tempered of men, not to say of lodgers, as you know very well, Mrs. Slocombe; but I do not like to be talked to as if I were a child or a simpleton. Never mind. We'll not say any more about it now; only recollect, unless I meet with more attention in such matters as this, you and I part. It's too bad, I declare! A lonely Christmas Eve, and not a spark of fire nor a drop of hot water to brew a glass of punch with; while you, I suppose, are going out to spend the evening in jovial company. Don't be too jovial, Mrs. Slocombe, that's all. Recollect, I shall want my breakfast at the usual time in the morning. Not a minute later, mind--Christmas or no Christmas. I know your amiable weakness in the matter of other people's gin. Mrs. Slocombe; but have some discretion, I pray. Oh--now we're in a passion, and you won't spoil your paper. Stop, Mrs. Slocombe. Don't go yet. Where is the cat? Not know? You don't know where the cat is? Have I never told you that I like to have the cat in my room on an evening? No, of course I don't expect you to go running over the roofs after the cat; and I must say that I don't consider it respectful in you to make such a remark; but I do think that when I go to such an enormous expense to maintain your cat, I might surely have the pleasure of its society now and then--the only society I am able to get now, poor wretch that I am! What is that you say? Ran away after stealing the chicken? What chicken, which chicken? whose chicken? Heavens above! there ever such audacity? Do you mean to tell me--can you tell me without blushing that your cat has eaten my cold chicken which I was to have had for my supper? Nay, I will be calm--but this is too much! I shall not condescend to handy words with you, Mrs. Slocombe. To-morrow is Christmas Day; on the day following we will discuss the matter more fully. I wish you a very good night, Mrs. Slocombe. What is that you say? "Not going to light my pipe?" Yes, of course I am going to light my pipe. How do you think I am going to spend Christmas Eve all alone, without as much as having a pipe? Oh, indeed! The new lady lodger on the first floor complains that she smells the smoke! It goes up the chimney, does it? Then pray give my compliments to your lady lodger, Mrs. Slocombe, and inform her with all due courtesy that I shall smoke when I please, and as much as I please, and whether she or you like it or not. And you may add, Mrs. Slocombe, that she will not be annoyed by it much longer, for that I am going to leave the house this day week--yes, this day week, Mrs. Slocombe; and let us see whether you will get as good and as easily pleased a lodger again. There, I have done. I meant to have let Christmas pass before giving notice, but that last outrage finished me. This day week I leave you. There--that's enough--good-night, Mrs. Slocombe, good-night.

So, that is over--and I am glad of it. Things were really getting quite unendurable. Here's a pretty state of things for a Christmas Eve! No fire, no hot water, no supper, nobody to talk to--not even a cat; and if my landlady and that blessed lady lodger of hers--some old maid, I suppose--could have had their way, not even as much as a quiet smoke! I did look forward to some little comfort when I came home, for never did I want it more. It is not that I care so much for the things themselves, as that it is an affair of sentiment, of feeling. I came home with the full intention of thoroughly enjoying the fact that I am a bachelor; of saying to myself--"See how happy I am! No wife to scold me; no baby to squall; no servants to trouble me; in short, no harass, worry, no vexation, no care. There is my fragrant glass of punch, here my cosy fire, here my purring cat, here my prized, my indisputable-looking short pipe, abomination of wives. Long for me, ladies; long in vain--I am proof to your attractions. Envy me, husbands, sigh for the independence you have lost. Attain it again you never can; for even a widower is not a bachelor; he has

passed under the yoke, the freshness of bachelor life can never again be his." That did I hope to congratulate myself, and thus miserably am I disappointed; and indeed I feel that I require a little self-congratulation: can it be self-consolation? Away, horrible thought! Let me light my pipe and meditate. Confound the old maid up-stairs! It shan't be my fault if I don't smoke her out this blessed night--that is, if she really can smell the smoke, which I don't believe at all.

Well, I certainly never was so taken aback by any piece of news in all my life! I could have believed anything of Ned Stokes except this; but the idea that my dear, queer, delightful old chum has actually gone and got married has flattened me down altogether! Not Ned's greatest enemy could have averred--not Ned's most cherished friend could have feared that he had one grain of respectability in his composition: yet see the horrid reality! Only fancy Ned married--and well married too--that's the worst of it! The lady handsome, amiable, well-educated, and rich; without one single flaw of any kind to account for the conduct of my most unimpeachable friend. Had she been a widowed washerwoman now with ten children, or a giantess in a show, or an Indian squaw, or anything of that sort, there would have been a sort of extravagant consistency about Ned's conduct. It would have been like Ned. But this is really too bad. Faithless Ned Stokes! To think that thou shouldst be a traitor and desert to the ranks of domestic martyrs! Is there then no trust to be put in man?

So, the fire is getting up a bit now under my indolent piping, and the kettle is positively boiling. Now for a glass of punch. Prime tobacco this, really. Poor Ned! no more tobacco for you, old fellow! It will never be allowed in the house, that's certain; and I should hope that, with such a wife, you would never taint your breath and your clothes with the fumes of smoke. If you do, Ned, you will be a regular thoroughbred respectable man after all. You will be neither one thing nor the other, but only a miserable, contemptible half-and-half. No, no, Ned! That won't do. Be something! be something! You have deserted from your own ranks to those of the enemy. Stick to them now, and do your devoir. There is no redemption here.

Ah! here's my cat at last, looking as innocent as a lamb. No one who looked in your face, my cat, could believe for a moment that the guilt of chicken-stealing was lying on your soul. That's right, my cat--stretch yourself out upon my knee, blink at the fire, and purr. Come, really, this is something like comfort at last. Well, Mr. Stokes, there is no use in mourning over your untimely fate; and pray do not think on any account that I envy you. Oh dear, no! Your defection has given me for the time a feeling of loneliness and desolation. That is all. Like the mariner who sees his shipmate swept overboard by the sea, I mourn your fate, but have not the slightest desire to follow you. Well, old fellow, here's a merry Christmas and a happy New Year to you, at any rate, if such a wish under the circumstances is not altogether vain.

How came it now that I have escaped getting married myself? I fell in love often enough, a few years ago; and once, I remember, most particularly so. Fussy you shall be my confidant. I will tell you all about it. Christmas Eve is the very time for story telling. Listen, my cat, to a true story of blighted affection; give sympathy for my sorrows, and rejoice that I have got over them so well.

CHAPTER II.

MY REMINISCENCES.

I am a young man still, but I was several years younger when I made my first and only offer. I first loved my love at a small tear-party at Highgate. She was an angel of the name of Simmons, and floated about on white muslin which was pervaded by a soft faint radiance of pink. At that period of my life love was a daily necessity of my existence. I was forever meeting with peerless maidens, each one of whom always eclipsed every one who had been seen before her; and I was generally true to the last--faded in love as long as I was in her company, or until I met with another still more divine. My last love, Clara, was not at the party in question; and as my affection had somewhat cooled towards her of late, on account of a cold in her head which had filled her eyes with water instead of fire, and had made her nose red and unromantic, I of course looked around the room to decide as to who should be the object of my undying affection for the evening. Miss Simmons was there, and Miss Simmons was selected without hesitation or delay. But for her, indeed I believe I must have fallen in love with Miss Corker of the spiral angles, who, as a racing man would say, ran at bad second; but Miss Simmons being peerless among the company, I fell so desperately in love with her that Clara was at once utterly and entirely banished from her throne as queen of my soul, and Miss Simmons reigned in her stead.

At this tea-party there were but two nice young men present, reckoning myself as one. I do not mean to say of the other that he was at all nice in my estimation, but that he was the only person present beside myself from whom could be expected the requisite polite attentions which form the duties of young men at small tea-parties. Indeed, there were but four men present altogether on this occasion, two of them being old fogies who dropped in after tea in precisely the same costume which they had worn at business throughout the day--a free-and-easy style of going into society which made me think almost with shame of my cold clean shirt, adjusting my white necktie, and squeezing my thin-stocked feet, corns and all, into those too finely-fitting patent-leather boots. One of the fogies, a fat solemn man of a meditative disposition, soon withdrew to smoke a pipe with our host, who never appeared in society; and the other, who at first seemed to be of a joking, jovial turn, was shortly afterwards quenched in a rubber of whist with three old ladies. Mr. Tinkler and myself alone remained; and little did I think, when we were left the only representatives of mankind among so many girls, and I clung to him as my sole rock of support amidst waves of muslin--little did I imagine then how intensely I should hate him before that evening drew to a close.

Let it not be supposed that because I was ready to fall in love on the slightest provocation, I was equally prompt in declaring the passion which consumed me to its object for the time being. No; to the Clara before mentioned I had made no nearer approach to an avowal of my love than by sending her a very tender poetical effusion (not original), cunningly posted at a distant town, lest the London post-mark should be an impediment to the sender, and the odds were great that it should make no better progress in declaring my passion to Miss Simmons. The fact is that I was absurdly bashful, and I had a habit of blushing, which, as I well remember, was one of the greatest tortures of my life. Tinkler was a very different being. I was silent, he was voluble. My arms were in my way, my legs were disobedient, and I could find no refuge for my hands. Tinkler's arms were always getting around the young ladies' waists, his legs were wonders of agility, and he could have found constant employment for half a dozen pairs of hands, had he possessed as many. We had quadrilles, the young ladies dancing with each other for want of other partners, while one of their number played very much out of time on the piano. Tinkler kept the whole set laughing, while I could only remark to my partner that the weather was cold, and ask whether she was fond of dancing. Tinkler skipped about like a ferret, in a manner excessively ill-bred, and supremely grotesque and absurd. I could not for the life of me lose my self-consciousness sufficiently to do more than walk through the figures as if we had been at a grand ball instead of at a small evening party. The contrast between our relative conceptions of the character of *cavalier seul* was most striking; and I am bound to confess that if mine excelled his in dignity, his appeared to be far the more amusing and popular.

I do not suppose that I should have hated Mr. Tinkler if in a general sort of way. But what made me hate him was that, amidst all his fun, he paid the most particular attention to Miss Simmons. He waltzed with her again and again to the admiration of the whole company (I cannot wait at all), steering clear of all obstacles in that compact but small apartment, in a manner most wonderful to behold; and he took her down to supper, and sat down beside her, and fed her with chickens, and tongue, and hummers, and custards and all the rest of it; and altogether appeared to me to find even greater favor in her eyes than in those of the other ladies present, and that is saying very great deal, I am sure.

And so it came to pass that before the evening was over I hated Tinkler, I hated myself, and I felt half inclined to hate Miss Simmons also, and give my affections to Miss Corker. How came it, then, that before I retired to rest that night I became indulgent and kindly towards Tinkler, in ecstasies with myself, and more desperately in love with Miss Simmons than I had ever been with anybody in the world before?

It was in this wise:-- When the party broke up it was found that the servant whom Miss Simmons had expected to attend her had by some accident not arrived; so when she came down stairs warmly wrapped up in shawl and furs, and looking even more bewitching than she had appeared in her gossamer muslin, Tinkler and I came forward at the same moment, offering to escort her to her home. Tinkler's manner of course expressed not the slightest diffidence of himself, or doubt that he was the proper and only person to pay her this attention; while I was very timid and awkward about it, and fully expected a snub. What was my surprise and delight when, very coldly declining Tinkler's offer, she, with the sweetest of smiles, placed her gloved fingers on my arm in a way which set me tingling from top to toe! Tinkler said something very witty and very impudent, I suppose, as it set everybody laughing except Miss Simmons and myself, who did not hear it; but though I felt myself blushing to the tips of my ears, I did not care, for in another moment we had left the house, and Miss Simmons and I were alone together in the clear moonlight.

The very first thing she asked me was, what I thought of Mr. Tinkler? I was about hypocritically to reply that he appeared a very nice and amusing young man, when she interrupted me with-- "Oh, I can't bear him! The rude, ill-bred fellow--wonder that he gets into any society at all!"

I confess that I did not scruple after this to express a similar opinion, though I wondered somewhat why she had waltzed with him so often, and had allowed him to pay her so much attention during supper; and then we dropped the subject, and began to talk about moonlight, and poetry, and all sorts of sentiment to such a degree that before long I actually, for the first time in my life, found myself making love *à la mode*.

I must not dwell on that talk to Miss Simmons' house. Suffice it to say that before I parted from her at the door I had actually become bold enough to squeeze her hand! Wonderful to relate--the squeeze was returned! That squeeze clenched and riveted my love to such a degree that under favorable circumstances I think it would never have got loose again; and from that time forth, for I am afraid to say how long, I could think of nothing else, I could dream of nothing else. My whole soul was, so to speak, saturated with the love of Miss Simmons.

Yet notwithstanding all this, months passed away before I was bold enough absolutely to ask her to be mine. I never found her in so tender a mood again, and though I obtained permission to call at her house, when I was there some third person was sure to be present. Also Miss Simmons had some money, and therefore her father of course wished her to marry a rich man. I cherished the hope that she herself was not insensible to my love; but I was painfully conscious, whenever I called to see her, that nobody else in the house wanted me; and accordingly I soon began to draw my happiness or my misery--I scarcely know which it was--from neutral rambles in the neighborhood of my charmer's dwelling, with the hope, too seldom realized, of catching glimpses of her candle when she retired to bed. I believe I should never have proposed but for the following circumstance:-- One day I met by chance in the Strand my old schoolfellow Jack Brown. We dined together, and I drank rather more wine than I was accustomed to; so that, without being tipsy, I was decidedly a little elevated. As we afterwards walked through the streets arm-in-arm, Jack, who was always the most open-hearted fellow in the world, told me the whole history of his loves and hopes; and I, who am generally as reserved as the communion-table, must nevertheless return his confidence by unveiling the feelings of my inmost heart with regard to Miss Simmons. Jack then laughed at me for my slowness to such a degree that I felt thoroughly abashed of myself, and vowed that I would delay no longer, but would make her an offer in writing that very day.

In pursuance of this desperate resolve, as soon as Jack Brown had left me, I entered the coffee-room of a hotel and called for pen, ink, and paper. On pulling out my purse to pay for it, I found that I had only one solitary sovereign left, and recollected with horror that it would be quite three weeks before I could expect the next remittance from my father, who was so good as to take out my own narrow income. A nice position I was in for making an offer of marriage! Never mind. Let the world collapse, Emily Simmons must be mine! I began to write, but could not please myself, and several sheets of note paper were spoiled before I had written the first page. At length I got thus far, but the pen was a broad one, there was no blotting-paper and no fire, and the ink took a long time to dry. I had no time to spare if I wished to save the post, and while I was waiting, it struck me that I might as well write a note to my father, begging him to anticipate my quarterly allowance. So I put the half-written letter to Miss Simmons on one side for the time, and commenced the other. This I thought I was going to dash off in a moment, but I did not get on with the facility I had expected. Words require to be well chosen in making such applications, especially to such a man as my father; so it was some time before the first page of this letter was ready for the drying process. Then I took up the other again, but here the choice of words was still more difficult, and I soon spoiled it, and had to commence it afresh. Then I got nervous and spoiled the other also; and in fact had consumed a large quantity of paper, and several glasses of brandy-and-water, before I could get the first two letters at all to my satisfaction. At length they were finished, and I hurried off and posted them exactly in time, just two or three seconds before the stroke of the clock.

By the next day's post I got replies to both my letters at once--the address of one being in my mother's writing, the other in an elegant, lady-like hand, which was, no doubt, the autograph of Miss Simmons. How my heart beat as I opened the letter! But fancy my consternation when I saw my own letter was returned, accompanied by the following short note:--

"Miss Simmons returns the inclosed letter with the contempt it merits, and regrets that she should ever have made the acquaintance of a person at once so mercenary and so stupid."

Here was a settler to my hopes! What could it mean? "So mercenary!" I mercenary! I who had positively regretted that Miss Simmons had any money at all! Good gracious! Was it possible that I had put the letters into the wrong envelopes? Such things had been heard of. I broke open the inclosure. No, it was all right. It was my letter to herself, commencing with "Adorable Miss Simmons." In a state of bewilderment I opened my mother's letter. It inclosed a ten-pound note, and ran as follows:--

"MY DEAR ALFRED:-- "What could be the meaning of that dreadful incoherent letter you wrote to your father? We could make out from the commencement of it that you are in want of money, but I never read anything so strange and incomprehensible as the latter part. Oh, my dear Alfred, how could you call your father a charmer? He is naturally most deeply mortified at such a term being applied to him. He says you must have been tipsy when you wrote it; but I know that my dearest Alfred could never be guilty of that dreadful vice. Your father protested that he would not send you a farthing, but left a ten-pound note on his desk, and I enclose it to you, fully believing that he intended me to do so. Take care of yourself, my dearest Alfred, and never call your father a charmer again."

"Your loving Mother, "JEMIMA PIPPINGTON."

What could my mother mean? I had never called my father a charmer or anything of the kind. He was a little, short, quiet, high-dried, matter-of-fact snuff-taking country attorney; an excellent father, in his undemonstrative way, but the last man in the world one would think of calling a charmer. Quite unable to understand the affair I took up my rejected offer, and mechanically read it through. Yes, it was all right. I recollected every word as I went on. What was there in this to make Miss Simmons think me mercenary or stupid? Nothing. Stay, though--what was this? There was some mistake. This was not what I intended to write to the young lady. I recollect every word of that letter at the present moment. I shall never forget it. It ran thus:--

"ADORABLE MISS SIMMONS:-- "I can no longer delay the request which I have to make to you. Again and again you must have seen it trembling on my lips when either some awkward interruption or some fluttering of my own heart has prevented its being spoken. Oh, Miss Simmons! Oh, Emily! Do not refuse me! Oh, mistress of my soul, give me by return of post, if possible, five-and-twenty pounds, for I have had some heavy expenses of late, and, in a word, as I know that you like to people to come at once to the point, am regularly hard up."

"Yours, very obediently, "ALFRED PIPPINGTON."

Now I saw through it! In the haste and confusion of writing the letters, and especially through having changed from one to the other while waiting for the ink to dry, I had made the amazing blunder of commencing one letter to the lady and continuing it to my father; and of beginning another to that respected parent, and finishing it with what was intended for the eye of Miss Simmons. Was ever anything so absurd! I rushed at once to the lady's house, but was denied admittance. I wrote to her a letter of explanation, but it was returned unopened. I never saw her again. Soon after this her father took her away; and before very long I heard that she was; Miss Simmons no longer, but had married a rich man called Potts, old enough to be her grandfather. What has become of her now I don't know. For a long time I felt my disappointment very much, but lately I have become reconciled to it, for if I had married Miss Simmons, what would have become of my glorious bachelor independence? Oh dear, yes, it was a very fortunate escape--a very fortunate escape indeed.

There, my cat, that is the history of my attempt to get married--I hope you have been edified. What! sleeping all the time? Well, never mind. At all events you have not interrupted me. What woman would have let me talk so long without some contradiction? Now for another pipe, and one more glass of punch before going to bed.

CHAPTER III.
MY FATHER'S WAYS TO ME.
Who is there? Oh, it's you, Mrs. Slocombe. Have you come to say that you have found the chicken, Mrs. Slocombe? What? The new lady lodger wishes to speak to me? Not to complain of the tobacco smoke, I hope, for I don't feel disposed to put up with any impertinence. Heard you mention my name, asked for some particulars, and thought she recognized an old acquaintance? Where is she? Oh, this is the lady, I suppose. Pray walk in, madam; take a chair. What can I have the honor of doing for you, madam?--What! Can it be? Miss Simmons! I beg your pardon, Mrs. Potts! Heavens, what a remarkable coincidence! Shut the door after you, Mrs. Slocombe. No, Miss Simmons--Mrs. Potts, I mean--it was not a chance; it is a case of animal magnetism or something of that kind. Why you have been filling my thoughts for the whole of this evening. Oh, you did find out at last that you had condemned me unjustly! It is so kind of you to say that! And you have really been wishing to see me, and tell me this? Oh, Miss Simmons--I beg your pardon, Mrs. Potts! A widow are you, with-out children, living alone and desolate in furnished apartments? Ah, I know so well what it is to lead a lonely life in lodgings! Left well off, are you, and looking out for a nice house? If I can be of any assistance to you, pray command me. Come, take this chair by the fire, and let us have a chat about old times. No, it is not late--not at all, and there is nothing improper, I am sure, in your speaking to an old friend for a few minutes. Do take a chair. Stop a moment while I drive down the cat. Confound that cat! It is always in the way.

Good-night, then, dearest, if you must go. Oh, Emily, you have made me the happiest of men! Good-night! (Good-night!)

Mrs. Slocombe! Mrs. Slocombe! Be so good as to step this way for a moment. You have been married two or three times, I believe, Mrs. Slocombe! Do you happen to know whether it would be possible to procure a license on Christmas Day?--London Society.

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